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DRESS AND ORNAMENTS OF THE NEW ENGLAND INDIANS

By CHARLES C. WILLOUGHBY

HAIRDRESSING

The hair of the New England Indians was dressed in various ways, the styles being determined in a measure by the age and station of the individual. At the age of puberty the boys were permitted to wear it long; previous to that period it was cut in various ways. Some of them wore a long foretop, a long lock on the crown, and one on each side of the head, the rest of the hair being cut even with the scalp.¹ Among the Omaha the boys belonging to different gentes had their hair cut in forms symbolic of their particular gens.² It seems probable that a similar practice was prevalent in New England. The men sometimes wore their hair in a loose, disheveled manner,³ although generally, and especially among the better class, much care was observed in oiling and dressing it. The young men and soldiers frequently wore it long on one side, that of the opposite side being cut short.⁴ The long hair upon the left side was bound into a knot.⁵

Another method which seems to have been quite general was to gather and tie the hair into a long round knot at the back of the head, like "a horse's tail bound with a fillet."⁶ In this knot or twist feathers of the eagle or turkey were fastened.⁷ The front hair was cut short or was shaved far up on the head, the long hair remaining being combed and twisted in various ways and intertwined with

¹ Wood, *New England's Prospect*, p. 72.

² Alice C. Fletcher, *A Study of the Omaha Tribe*, Smithsonian Report, 1897, p. 582, pl. 11.

³ John Ogilby, *America: Being an Accurate Description of the New World*, p. 151.

⁴ Wood, op. cit., p. 72.

⁵ Morrill, *Poem on New England*, Mass. Hist. Coll., 1st series, vol. 1, p. 131, repr. 1859.

⁶ Wood, op. cit., p. 71.

⁷ *Gookin's Hist. Collections*, Mass. Hist. Coll., 1st series, vol. 1, p. 153.

feathers,¹ as already noted. Higgeson mentions one lock being longer than the rest;² he probably refers to the scalp-lock. The hair of the Mount Hope warriors was trimmed "comb fashion,"³ that is like a cockscomb, both sides of the head being shaved, leaving a ridge of comparatively short, upright hair extending across the head from front to back. The hair was sometimes gathered and tied in two locks or rolls,⁴ the common method among most modern Indians who wear it long.

The beard was rarely allowed to grow,⁵ but was removed as it appeared. This custom was not universal, however, for Brereton⁶ noticed several Indians with black, thin beards in the party who met Gosnold.

There is little information as to the methods of dressing women's hair. Verrazano⁷ says they adorned their heads with divers ornaments made of their own hair which hung down before on each side of their breasts. Champlain⁸ saw a girl with her hair very neatly dressed with a skin colored red and bordered on the upper part with little shell beads. A portion of it hung down behind, the rest being braided in various ways. Both sexes sometimes powdered their hair.⁹

TATTOOING

Tattooing seems to have been confined principally to the cheeks, upon which totemic figures were made. Wood¹⁰ writes that many of the better class bore "upon their cheeks certain pourtratures of beasts, as bears, deares, mooses, wolves, etc., some of fowls, as of eagles, hawkes, etc., which be not a superficial painting but a certain incision or else a raising of their skin by a small, sharp instrument under which they convey a certain kind of black unchangeable ink which makes the desired form apparent and permanent."

¹ Champlain, *Voyages*, vol. II, p. 63 (Prince Society).

² Higgeson, *New England Plantation*, Mass. Hist. Coll., 1st series, vol. I, p. 123.

³ Drake, *History of Philip's War*, p. 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁵ Champlain, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁶ Brereton, *Account of Gosnold's Voyage*, Mass. Hist. Coll., 3d series, vol. VIII.

⁷ Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages*, Hakluyt Society's reprint, p. 65.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁹ Gookin, *op. cit.*, p. 153. S. G. Drake, *Tragedies of the Wilderness*, p. 52.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

Johnson¹ notes a blue cross tattooed ("dyed very deep") over the cheek-bones of the women.

FACE PAINTING

Face painting was common with both sexes, and among the men more especially when on war raids. Soot was commonly used for black, and red earth or the powdered bark of the pine tree for red.² These were the more common colors. White, yellow, and blue were also used. Waymouth³ saw men with their bodies painted black and their faces black or red, some having stripes of excellent blue over their upper lip, nose, and chin. The eyebrows were sometimes painted white.

The women painted their faces with various colors and in time of mourning with black.⁴ They "painted their faces in the hollow of their eyes and nose with a shining black, out of which the tip of their nose appears very deformed, and their cheek bones being of a lighter swart black on which they have a blue cross dyed very deep."⁵

CLOTHING

The breech-clout was worn by both sexes. It was made of the skin of various animals, dressed with or without the hair. Champlain saw the skin of the doe and seal used for this purpose. Archer⁶ speaks of seal skin, Waymouth⁷ of beaver skin, and Brereton⁸ of black tanned skin. Later a strip of European cloth a yard and a half long was used in place of the skin of an animal. A girdle of snake skin⁹ or other material (Samoset's girdle was fringed) served to support the breech-clout, which passed between the legs of the wearer, its ends being joined to the belt or carried up before and behind between the body and the girdle, over which

¹ Edward Johnson, *A History of New England*, London, 1654, p. 116.

² Roger Williams, *Key into the Language of America*, Coll. R. I. Hist. Soc., vol. I, pp. 154, 160.

³ Waymouth, *Voyage to the Coast of Maine*, Mass. Hist. Coll., 3d series, vol. VIII, pp. 136, 146.

⁴ Gookin, op. cit., p. 153.

⁵ Johnson, op. cit., p. 116.

⁶ Archer, *Account of Gosnold's Voyages*, Mass. Hist. Coll., 3d series, vol. VIII, p. 73.

⁷ Op. cit., p. 136.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 88.

⁹ Ogilby, op. cit., p. 152.

they hung like an apron, "a flap before and a tail behind." It is probable that the apron mentioned by Williams, Brereton, and other writers was the broad end of the breech-clout hanging before. As a rule the boys wore no breech-clout until ten or twelve years of age, but the girls wore a "little apron" from their birth.¹ The woman's breech-clout hung down a little longer behind than the man's.²

Usually neither sex wore any other garment indoors,³ and it was not uncommon in earlier days for both sexes to appear out of doors in this scanty dress. In Wood's time the women usually wore an additional short garment of skins or of European cloth wrapped like a blanket about their lions, reaching down to their knees, which they never put off in the company of Europeans.

In addition to the breech-clout it was customary for the men, and sometimes for the boys, to wear close-fitting leggings of tanned deer skin.⁴ These were worn for warmth in cold weather, on dress occasions, and by hunters as a protection from brush and briars. Their lower ends were fastened within the moccasins⁵ and their upper extremities were secured by straps to the girdle, which was sometimes ornamented with pendants or "set with forms of birds or beasts." The leggings were ornamented with designs in yellow, blue, and red.⁶ The women also sometimes wore leggings.⁷

Moccasins were made usually of moose skin, this leather being thick and durable. When moose skin could not be obtained, deer skin was substituted. Beautiful moccasins of white dressed skin embroidered with dyed moose hair were sometimes worn by the women. Such moccasins were worn at dances⁸ and on other ceremonious occasions.

Mantles or robes were made of the skins of the moose, deer, bear, beaver, otter, raccoon, fox, and squirrel, and were worn by

¹ Williams, op. cit., p. 106.

² Champlain, op. cit., p. 85.

³ Williams, op. cit., p. 106.

⁴ Waymouth, op. cit., pp. 136, 140. Mourt's Relation, *Journal of the Pilgrims to Plymouth*, Cheever's reprint, p. 59.

⁵ Morton, *New English Canaan*, Prince Society's reprint, p. 142.

⁶ John Josselyn, *Two Voyages to New England*, Veazie reprint, p. 100.

⁷ Morton, op. cit., p. 144.

⁸ Mrs Rawlandson's Captivity in S. G. Drake's *Tragedies of the Wilderness*, p. 52.

both sexes. Beautiful cloaks were manufactured of the iridescent feathers of the wild turkey, "woven with twine of their own making,"¹ so that nothing could be seen but feathers. These cloaks were usually the work of the old men,² but sometimes were made by the women for their children.³

When in the vicinity of Wellsfleet harbor, Massachusetts, Champlain⁴ saw robes woven of "grass and hemp scarcely covering the body and coming down only to the thighs." These were probably identical with the silkgrass mantles of the southern Algonquians illustrated by John White in 1585.⁵

A single skin of the moose, deer, or bear served for a man's robe. Moose skins were commonly dressed without the hair and were made "wondrous white."⁶ Few examples of white-dressed buckskin have been preserved. A pair of old Algonquian moccasins of this material are in the Peabody Museum at Cambridge. They are of a uniform milk white, and in texture resemble the finest chamois skin. When used as a mantle the white-dressed moose skin was ornamented near its edges with a border in color laid on with size "in form like lace set on by a tailor, and some they stripe in size with works of several fashions very curious according to the several fantasies of the workmen wherein they strive to excel one another."⁷ Verrazano saw a similarly ornamented robe upon an Indian whom he met in southern New England in 1524.⁸ The colors used were evidently red, blue, and yellow.⁹ The Nascapsee and Montagnais to the north of the St Lawrence at the present time ornament the borders of their deer-skin robes and coats with elaborate ancient patterns in these colors, laid on with a size made of fish roe, a pointed bone serving instead of a brush. Examples of this modern work may be seen in the larger museums. Similar

¹ Morton, op. cit., p. 142.

² Williams, op. cit., p. 107.

³ Josselyn, op. cit., p. 78.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 85.

⁵ For a reproduction of this drawing see Eggleston, *Household History of the United States*, p. 70.

⁶ Morton, op. cit., p. 142.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 65.

⁹ Josselyn, op. cit., p. 100.

designs in bead-work upon the borders of the cloth coats of the Penobscot and Micmac chiefs are survivals of the ancient New England decoration. These bead-work designs are also similar to the painted designs of the north. Certain decorative motifs in these borders are persistent throughout a large portion of the great Algonquian area.

Deer-skin mantles were dressed with or without the hair, and a perfect tail greatly enhanced their value. In winter the hair was worn innermost.¹ Those especially prepared for summer wear were dressed usually without the hair. These garments were fastened at the shoulders with leather. They were thrown over one or both shoulders and brought usually under one arm.² When traveling they were also secured at the waist with a belt. This belt was sometimes hollow and served as a receptacle for parched corn, the usual food for a journey.³

The common method of wearing a mantle left one arm exposed. In cold weather this arm was usually covered with a "deepe furr'd cat [lynx] skin like a long large muffle which hee shifts to that arm which lieth most exposed to the winde."⁴

One of the Indians who, with Samoset, visited the Pilgrims, wore a "wild cat's skin or such like on one arm,"⁵ not carried hanging over the arm as some have supposed.

Nearly one hundred years previous to the arrival of the Pilgrims Verrazano also saw skins of the bay lynx worn as arm coverings by the Indians of southern New England.

Morrell, in his poem on New England, written in 1623, writes that "an otter skin their right arms doth keep warm." Levett evidently saw beaver skins used in pairs as detached sleeves.⁶ Waymouth says some of the mantles "had sleeves, most had none." He does not make it clear, however, whether they were attached to the mantle or formed separate articles of clothing. The Nascapsee

¹ Levett, *Voyages to the Coast of Maine*, Mass. Hist. Coll., 3d series, vol. VIII p. 178.

² Higgeson, op. cit., p. 123.

³ Williams, op. cit., p. 33.

⁴ Wood, op. cit., p. 73.

⁵ Mourt, op. cit., p. 59.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 170.

and Montagnais and the neighboring Eskimo wore coats fitted with sleeves, and it is possible that the eastern Maine Indians may have had such garments in prehistoric times, but there is hardly enough evidence to warrant the assumption.

The men wore at the girdle a pouch of dressed skin containing fire-making implements.¹ A pipe and tobacco were also carried in the pouch, which was sometimes suspended from the neck.² The women's robes were longer and fuller than those of the men. Instead of one deer or bear skin two were sewed at full length. These garments were so long as to drag on the ground "like a great ladies train."³ For want of better clothing the poorer classes sometimes used grass or the leaves of trees.⁴ This practice does not seem to have been common. During the first trading expedition of the Pilgrims the Indian women sold their robes "from their backs, and tied boughs about them, but with great shamefastnesse."⁵

HEADRESS

Eagle or turkey feathers were worn in the hair. A headdress of upright feathers was also worn, which was probably similar to those common among many modern tribes. It was like a coronet,⁶ broadwise like a fan⁷ or like a turkey-cock's train.⁸

A curious head ornament of colored deer hair was worn, similar to those common among certain western tribes during the century just past. The western examples are fastened to the scalp-lock and cross the head from front to back, the dyed hair of which they are made being longer in front and standing upright. Gookin⁹ describes those of New England as "deer shuts made in the fashion of a cock's comb dyed red and crossing their heads like a half moon." Waymouth refers to them as a "kind of coronet . . . made very cunningly of a substance like stiff hair colored red,

¹ Brereton, op. cit., p. 91.

² Williams, op. cit., pp. 55, 108.

³ Morton, op. cit., p. 144.

⁴ Champlain, op. cit., p. 123.

⁵ Mourt, op. cit., p. 91.

⁶ Brereton, op. cit., p. 92.

⁷ Mourt, op. cit., p. 59.

⁸ Archer, op. cit., p. 75.

⁹ Op. cit., p. 153.

broad and more than a handful in depth." The skin of a black hawk was highly prized as a headdress. White feathered bird skins, a fox's tail, or a rattlesnake skin were also used. Headbands decorated with wampum and other beads were not uncommon.

ORNAMENTS IN GENERAL

Bracelets, necklaces, and head-bands were common, especially among the women. Mrs. Rawlandson saw a necklace of human fingers.¹ Ear pendants of copper were worn at an early period. Pendants in the form of birds, beasts, and fishes, carved from bone, shell, and stone, were worn in the ears,² also the brilliant skin of the humming bird. Verrazano,³ in 1524, saw many plates of wrought copper. Archer saw a piece of copper a foot in length and half as wide, used as a breast-plate. Brereton,⁴ in 1602, saw a "great store of copper, some very red, some of a paler color [brass]. None of them but have chains, earrings or collars of this metal. . . . Their chains are many hollow pieces cemented together, each piece of the bigness of one of our reeds, a finger in length, ten or twelve of them together on a string which they wear about their necks. Their collars they wear about their bodies like bandoliers, a handful broad, all hollow pieces like the other but somewhat shorter, four hundred pieces in a collar, very fine and evenly set together."

From archeological data we learn that native copper ornaments were used to a limited extent by the New England Indians, though they were probably never common. European copper and brass were acquired at a very early date and skilfully worked into tubular beads and other ornaments. At the time of Gosnold's voyage (1602) ornaments of these metals were so common among the southern New England natives that they offered to the explorers their "fairest collars and charms for a knife or such like trifle." Beads, plates, and triangular arrowpoints of copper and brass similar to those seen by Brereton and other writers have been taken from graves and village sites and may be seen in both public and private collections.

¹Op. cit., p. 48.

²Wood, op. cit., p. 74.

³Op. cit., p. 65.

⁴Op. cit., p. 91.

Both discoidal and tubular beads of shell were used in New England at an early date, but they were probably rare and highly prized in prehistoric days. Champlain saw shell beads used in embroidery and also as ornaments for the hair. Weymouth mentions bracelets of little round white bone strung together on a leather string. Bracelets of small shell beads were also found by the Pilgrims on the skeleton of a child at Cape Cod.

The New England Indians could have found little difficulty in making and perforating the discoidal beads with primitive tools. Perforating the larger tubular beads must have been difficult, but not beyond the ability of the primitive artisan.

There seems to be little evidence that the smaller tubular shell beads of the variety generally known as wampum were made to any extent by the New England Indians previous to the beginning of the seventeenth century. After receiving awls from European traders the Narragansetts and Pequots were able to produce it in considerable quantity, and these tribes grew "rich and potent" by its manufacture. Prior to 1627 there seems to have been very little wampum among the New England tribes, its use being confined to "ye sachems and some spetiall persons that wore a litle of it for ornament."¹ This harmonizes with what we have already learned of shell beads from the early explorers.

During the visit of the Dutch to Plymouth, in 1627, they sold to the English 50^{li} worth of wampum to barter with the Indians for furs and other commodities. It was two years before this small quantity was disposed of. The demand, however, steadily increased, and as it became known among the inland tribes the English could with difficulty obtain enough to supply the demand "for many years together." "Neither did the English of this plantation, or any other in ye land, till now that they had knowledge of it from ye Dutch so much as know what it was, much less yt it was a comoditie of that worth and vawle. But after it grue thus to be a comoditie in these parts, these Indians fell into it allso and to learne how to make it; for ye Narigansets doe geather ye shells of which y^e make it from their shors. And it has now continued a current comoditie aboute this 20 years."² The purple por-

¹ Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation*, Boston, 1898, p. 282.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 282-283.

tion of the quahog shell (*Venus mercenaria*) was used for making the colored variety of wampum.

Much of the later white wampum seems to have been made from the white part of the same shell. The columella of the periwinkle was also used for making the white variety. The beads are cylindrical and are perforated lengthwise. They average less than one-fourth of an inch in length by about one-eighth of an inch in thickness. The color of the dark variety varies from a uniform purplish black to a light purple, interveined with white lines and bars. The greater part of the wampum of Indian manufacture was made by the Narragansetts. The Dutch and the Swedes of the middle states from a very early date manufactured large quantities, and as late as 1844 it was made and sold by them to the Indian traders of the west.¹

Besides its use as currency, wampum was woven into garters, belts, bracelets, collars, ear pendants, neck ornaments, head bands, etc. It was used for ornamenting bags, wallets, and various articles of dress. The wampum belt, woven of purple and white beads in symbolic figures, served as an inviolable and sacred pledge which guaranteed messages, promises, and treaties.

Mrs Rawlandson² mentions an Indian woman who wore a "kersey coat covered with girdles of wampum from the loins upward. Her arms from her elbows to her hands were covered with bracelets; there were handfuls of necklaces about her neck." One of King Philip's belts, curiously wrought with "black and white wampum in various figures and flowers and pictures of many birds and beasts," was nine inches broad and when hung about Captain Church's shoulders reached to his ankles. Philip wore two other belts, one with two flags upon the back which hung from his head, the other with a star upon the end being hung from his breast.³ When Philip visited Boston he wore a coat and leggings set with wampum "in pleasant wild works" and a broad belt of the same.⁴

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¹ Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles used by the New York Indians*, p. 333.

² Op. cit., p. 52.

³ Drake, op. cit., p. 142.

⁴ Josselyn, op. cit., p. 111.